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GROUND SUPPORT
A DESERT SQUADRON HAD TO BE EVER-READY FOR ACTION!

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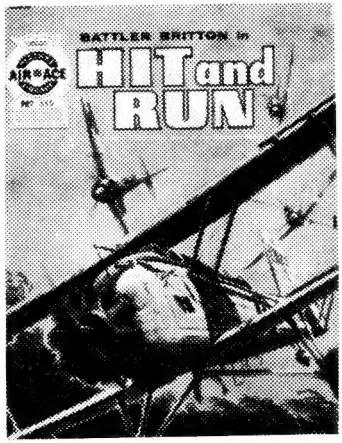

No. 396

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No. 397

INTRUDER MISSION

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GROUND SUPPORT

THE WAR IN THE DESERT WAS FAST-MOVING AND FLUID, WITH ACTIONS RANGING BACK AND FORTH ACROSS HUNDREDS OF MILES. THE BRITISH 8TH ARMY LEARNED TO LIVE AND FIGHT ON THE MOVE – AND SO TOO DID THE SQUADRONS OF PLANES THAT SUPPORTED THEM...

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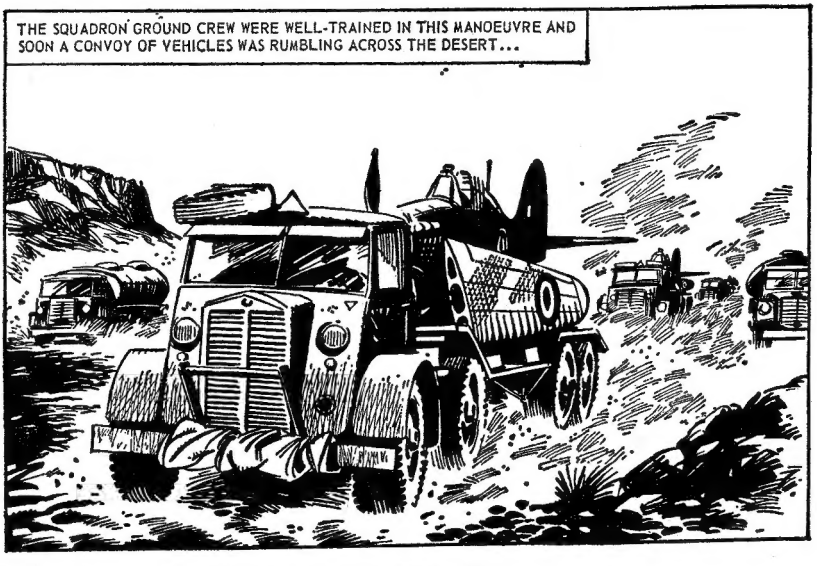
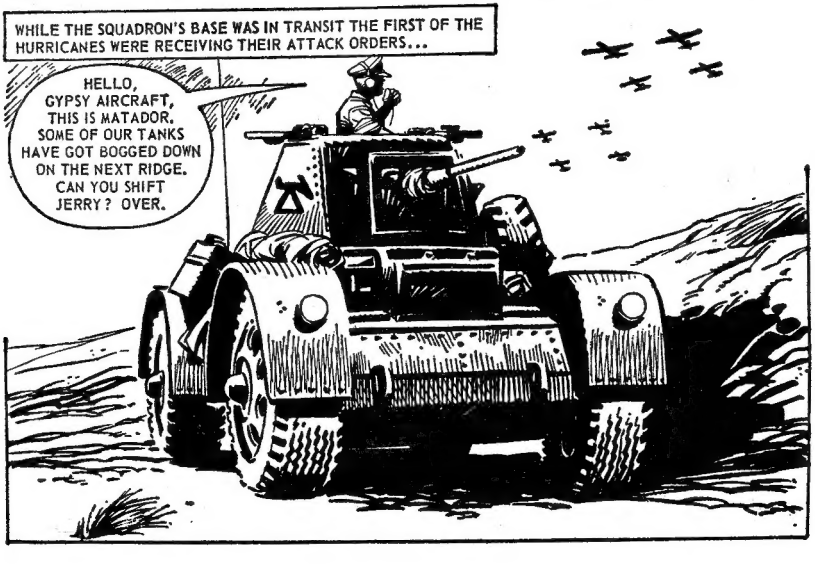
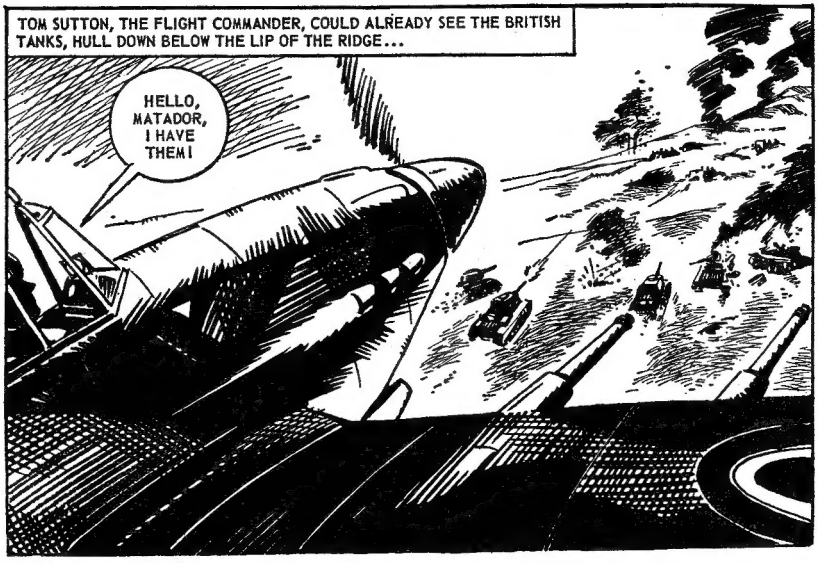
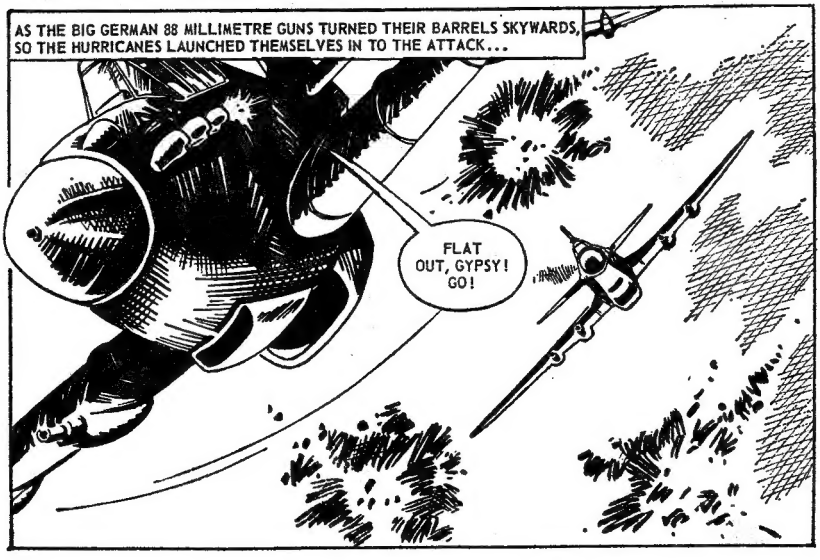
Chapter 1. THE GALLOPING GYPSIES

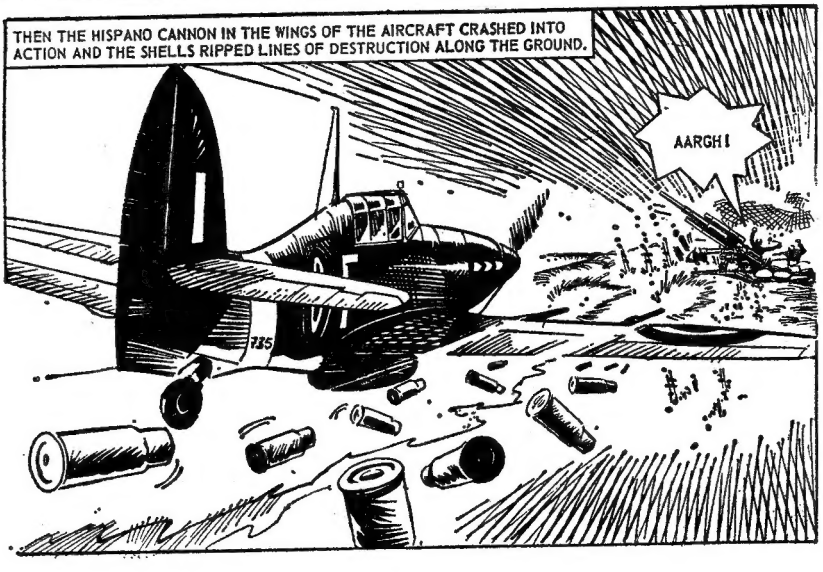

THE SQUADRON GROUND CREW WERE WELL-TRAINED IN THIS MANOEUVRE AND SOON A CONVOY OF VEHICLES WAS RUMBLING ACROSS THE DESERT...


WHILE THE SQUADRON'S BASE WAS IN TRANSIT THE FIRST OF THE HURRICANES WERE RECEIVING THEIR ATTACK ORDERS...
HELLO, GYPSY AIRCRAFT, THIS IS MATADOR. SOME OF OUR TANKS HAVE GOT BOGGED DOWN ON THE NEXT RIDGE. CAN YOU SHIFT JERRY? OVER.


TOM SUTTON, THE FLIGHT COMMANDER, COULD ALREADY SEE THE BRITISH TANKS, HULL DOWN BELOW THE LIP OF THE RIDGE...
HELLO, MATADOR, I HAVE THEM!

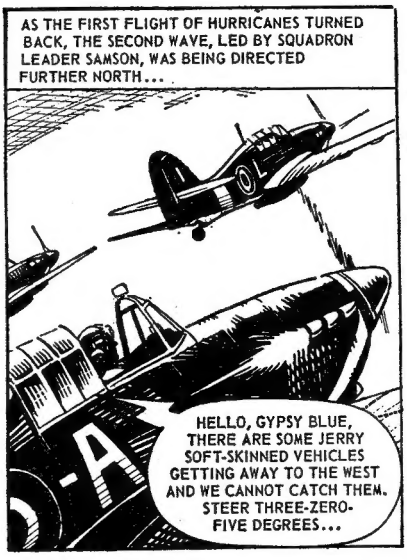

AS THE BIG GERMAN 88 MILLIMETRE GUNS TURNED THEIR BARRELS SKYWARDS, SO THE HURRICANES LAUNCHED THEMSELVES IN TO THE ATTACK...
FLAT OUT, GYPSY! GO!

THE ROAR OF THE ROLLS-ROYCE ENGINES AT FULL POWER FILLED THE SKY WITH SOUND, AS THE HURRICANES SNARLED DOWNWARDS...
FEUER! SCHNELL! FEUER!

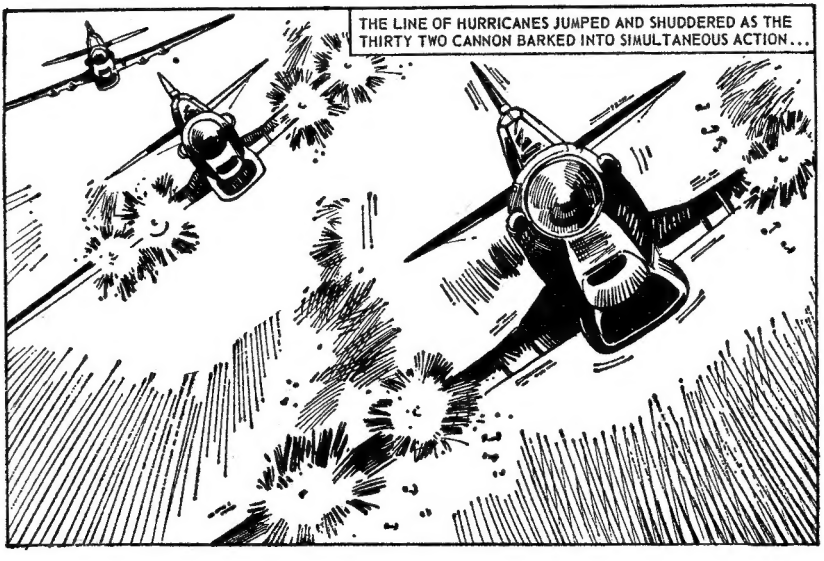

THEN THE HISPANO CANNON IN THE WINGS OF THE AIRCRAFT CRASHED INTO ACTION AND THE SHELLS RIPPED LINES OF DESTRUCTION ALONG THE GROUND.
AARGH!

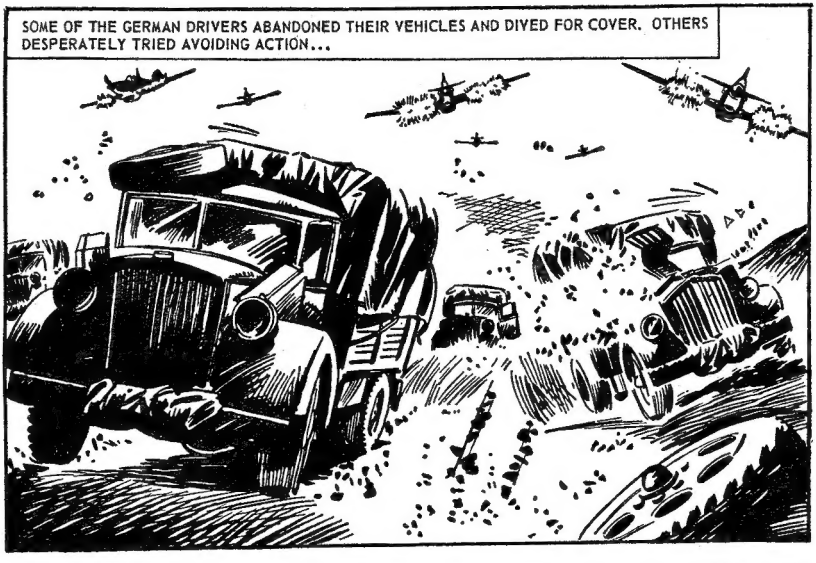
WITH THE GERMAN GUNNERS' ATTENTION DIVERTED, THE BRITISH TANK COMMANDER SEIZED HIS OPPORTUNITY...
COME ON! THIS IS OUR CHANCE! FORWARD!

THE SHATTERED GUN CREWS HAD NO CHANCE TO RECOVER FROM THE AIR ATTACK BEFORE THE TANKS WERE ON THEM...
THEY'RE CHUCKING IT IN! THOSE HURRICANES KNOCKED THE STUFFING OUT OF THEM.


AS THE FIRST FLIGHT OF HURRICANES TURNED BACK, THE SECOND WAVE, LED BY SQUADRON LEADER SAMSON, WAS BEING DIRECTED FURTHER NORTH...
HELLO, GYPSY BLUE, THERE ARE SOME JERRY SOFT-SKINNED VEHICLES GETTING AWAY TO THE WEST AND WE CANNOT CATCH THEM. STEER THREE-ZERO-FIVE DEGREES...

SAMSON SAW THE GERMAN TRUCKS IN THE DISTANCE. THEY WERE RUNNING FAST AND KICKING UP A LOT OF DUST...
GYPSY BLUE, PREPARE TO ATTACK. LINE ABREAST.
RAF


THE LINE OF HURRICANES JUMPED AND SHUDDERED AS THE THIRTY TWO CANNON BARKED INTO SIMULTANEOUS ACTION...


SOME OF THE GERMAN DRIVERS ABANDONED THEIR VEHICLES AND DIVED FOR COVER. OTHERS DESPERATELY TRIED AVOIDING ACTION...

THE HURRICANES ROARED OVERHEAD THEN PULLED UP AND TURNED...
TEUFEL! WE WON'T BE LUCKY TWICE, HANS – GET OUT!

THE FIGHTERS MADE ONE MORE RUN THEN SWEPT BACK THE WAY THEY HAD COME, LEAVING ONLY WRECKED AND BURNING VEHICLES IN THEIR WAKE...
VERDAMMT BRITISCHERS! WHAT ARE THE LUFTWAFFE DOING?

SAMSON TOOK THEM HIGH AS THEY TURNED TOWARDS EL ADEM. HE WAS FLYING OVER UNFAMILIAR TERRAIN, TOWARDS A LANDING GROUND HE HAD NEVER SEEN BEFORE...
MILES AND MILES OF SWEET NOTHING AT ALL...

THERE WAS NOTHING TO DO EXCEPT HOLD HIS COMPASS COURSE AND HAVE FAITH IN HIS GROUND CREW...
JIMMY DOUGAL AND THE REST OF THEM WON'T HAVE LET US DOWN...

SURE ENOUGH THE GROUND CREW ALREADY HAD THE LANDING GROUND OPERATING AND BY NOW THE HURRICANES OF THE FIRST FLIGHT WERE BEING DISPERSED ROUND THE BOUNDARY...

I'VE GIVEN THEM A GREEN – ARE YOU READY FOR THEM?

READY AND WAITING, SIR!

DOUGAL GUIDED SAMSON'S PLANE TO ITS DISPERSAL POINT AND SIGNALLED HIM TO SWITCH OFF...

EVERYTHING ALL RIGHT, CHIEFY?

FINE, SIR. CUP OF CHAR WAITING FOR YOU IN THE TENT, SIR.

WITH THE AIRCRAFT DISPERSED, THE MEN SAT AROUND DRINKING HOT, SWEET, TEA.

NOW I KNOW WHY THEY CALL US 'THE GALLOPING GYPSIES'!

WE'LL PROBABLY SEE A LOT OF THIS DESERT BEFORE WE'RE THROUGH, LAD.

'THE GALLOPING GYPSIES' PRIDED THEMSELVES ON THEIR ABILITY TO STAY UP WITH THE FORWARD TROOPS. IN THAT WAY THEY COULD ALWAYS GIVE A MAXIMUM EFFORT...

THAT PLACE IS NEAR ENOUGH FOR US TO MANAGE A FULL BOMB LOAD.

RIGHT, CHIEFY. TWO FIVE HUNDRED POUNDERS ON EACH OF TWELVE PLANES.

RIGHT, SIR.

AND SQUADRON LEADER MIKE SAMSON PAID MORE THAN LIP-SERVICE TO THE IDEA THAT HIS GROUND CREW WERE AS IMPORTANT AS THE PILOTS...

I WANT THE RATIONS POOLED, QUARTERMASTER. WE'LL ALL EAT TOGETHER.

NOT EVERYBODY APPROVED OF HIS METHODS, ESPECIALLY SQUADRON LEADER MAXWELL VINES COMMANDER OF ANOTHER HURRICANE SQUADRON IN THE WING...

CANT

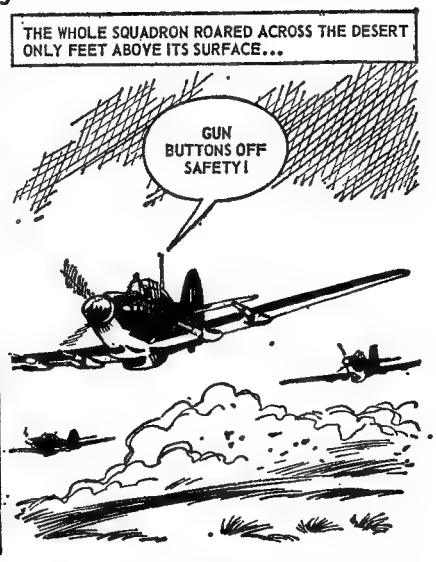
I DON'T LIKE IT, MIKE. IT UNDERMINES DISCIPLINE AND REDUCES EFFICIENCY.

DOES IT? WE WERE FIRST ON TO THIS LANDING GROUND – AND IF JERRY COMES BACK WE'LL BE THE LAST TO LEAVE.

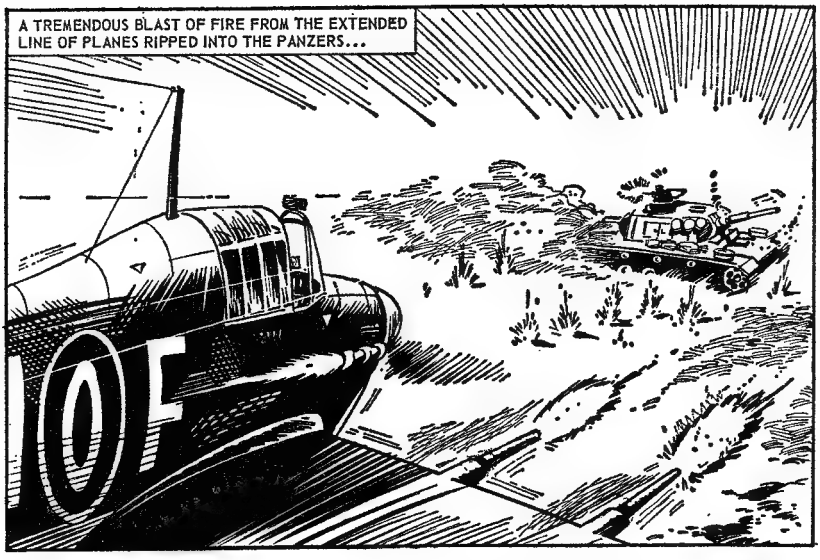
SAMSON'S WORDS WERE PROPHETIC, FOR THE FOLLOWING MORNING THEY RECEIVED AN URGENT CALL TO ACTION...
THERE'S A PANZER COLUMN HEADING EAST – THEY WANT US TO HAVE A CRACK AT IT.
A

HEAVILY ARMOURED TANKS INTERSPERSED WITH PLENTY OF MOBILE GUNS AND WITH THE WHOLE DESERT TO MANOEUVRE IN, WOULD BE NO EASY TARGET...

BUT SAMSON WAS A VETERAN OF THE DESERT WAR AND HE KNEW WHAT TACTICS TO ADOPT...
ON THE DECK, GYPSY.
A


THE WHOLE SQUADRON ROARED ACROSS THE DESERT ONLY FEET ABOVE ITS SURFACE...
GUN BUTTONS OFF SAFETY!

AT THAT HEIGHT THEY GAVE THE GERMANS LITTLE WARNING AND THEY HIT THE FLANK OF THE COLUMN AT 300 M.P.H....
ACHTUNG! FEUER! FEUER!


A TREMENDOUS BLAST OF FIRE FROM THE EXTENDED LINE OF PLANES RIPPED INTO THE PANZERS...
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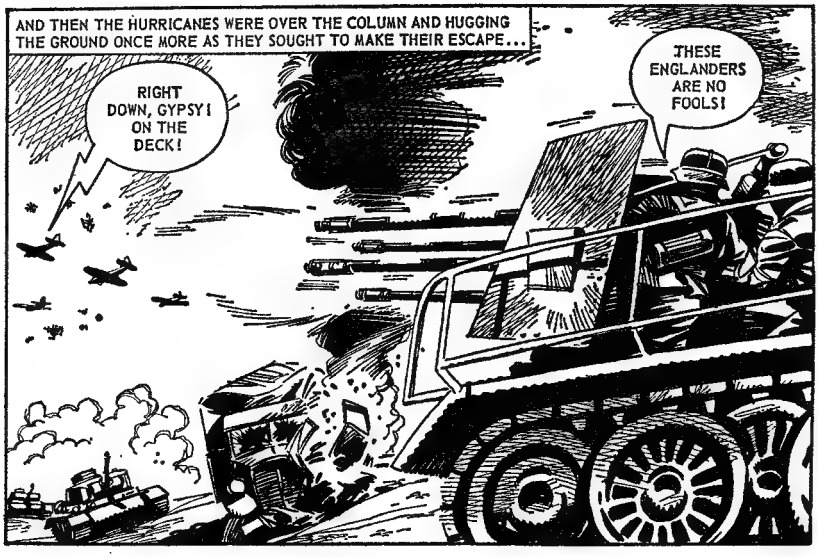
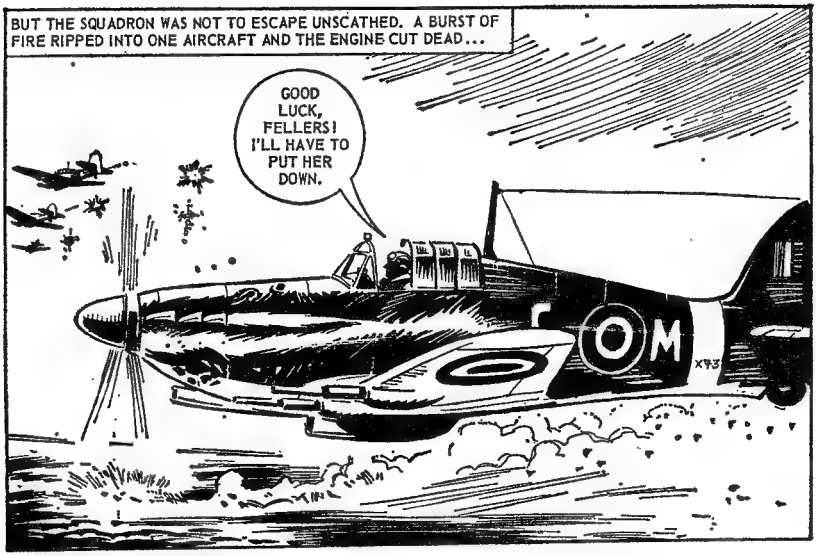
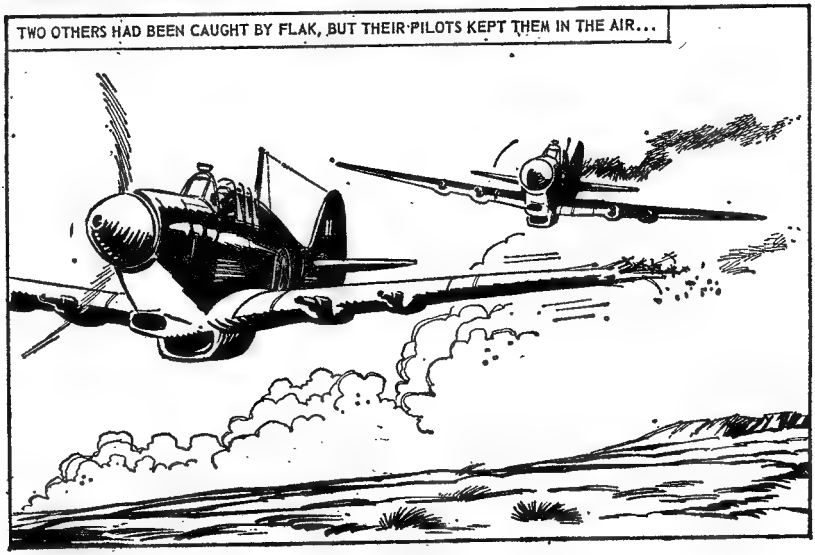
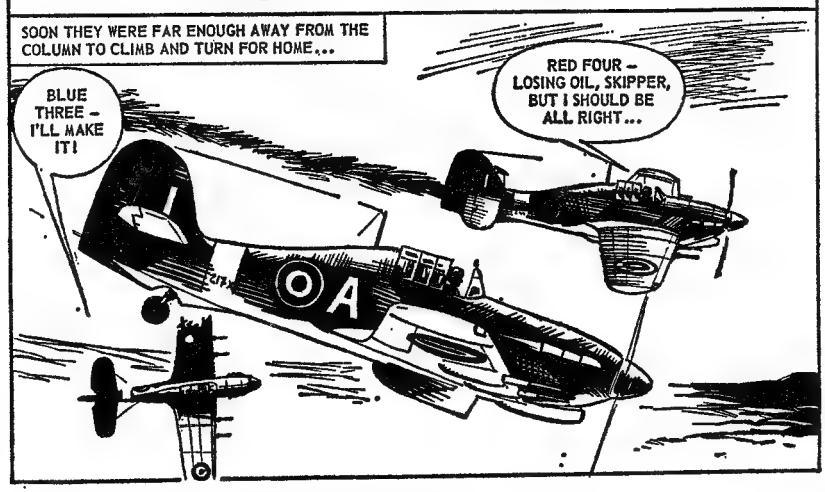

AND THEN THE HURRICANES WERE OVER THE COLUMN AND HUGGING THE GROUND ONCE MORE AS THEY SOUGHT TO MAKE THEIR ESCAPE...
RIGHT DOWN, GYPSY! ON THE DECK!
THESE ENGLANDERS ARE NO FOOLS!

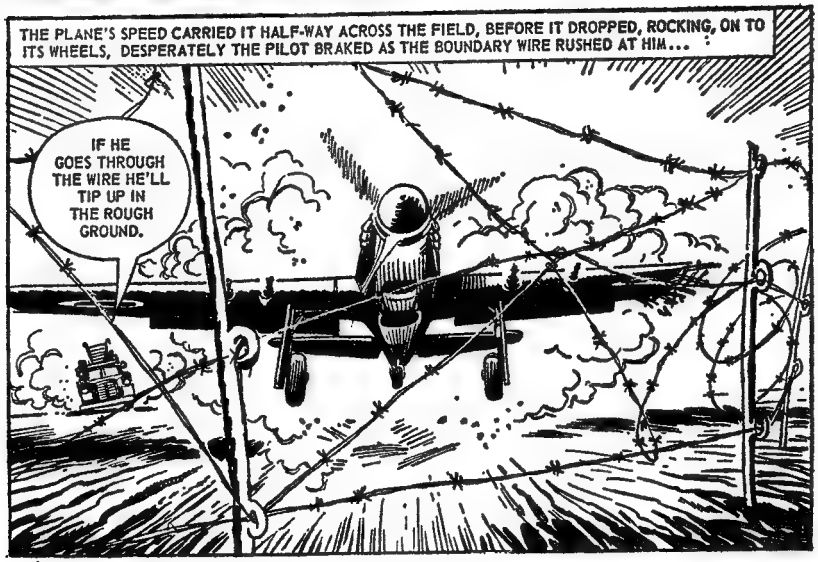

BUT THE SQUADRON WAS NOT TO ESCAPE UNSCATHED. A BURST OF FIRE RIPPED INTO ONE AIRCRAFT AND THE ENGINE CUT DEAD...
GOOD LUCK, FELLERS! I'LL HAVE TO PUT HER DOWN.
OM
X93


TWO OTHERS HAD BEEN CAUGHT BY FLAK, BUT THEIR PILOTS KEPT THEM IN THE AIR...

Chapter 2. *THE TRAP*



BLUE THREE HAD THE HARDER TASK. EVERY TIME HIS SPEED DROPPED, SO THE DAMAGED WING STALLED. SAMSON AND THE OTHERS LANDED FIRST AND STOOD READY BY THE CRASH WAGON...
IF HE GETS IT DOWN, HE'LL BE LUCKY IF HE STOPS IN TIME.


THE PLANE'S SPEED CARRIED IT HALF-WAY ACROSS THE FIELD, BEFORE IT DROPPED, ROCKING, ON TO ITS WHEELS, DESPERATELY THE PILOT BRAKED AS THE BOUNDARY WIRE RUSHED AT HIM...
IF HE GOES THROUGH THE WIRE HE'LL TIP UP IN THE ROUGH GROUND.

SUDDENLY ONE OF THE OVERHEATED BRAKES GRABBED AND LOCKED ONE WHEEL. THE PLANE GROUND-LOOPED VIOLENTLY AND ONE LEG SNAPPED UNDER THE STRAIN...

BOTH PILOTS CLIMBED OUT OF THEIR PLANES UNHURT, BUT THE AIRCRAFT WERE EACH A SORRY MESS...

A COUPLE OF WRITE-OFFS, EH, CHIEFY? IT'LL TAKE US TIME TO GET REPLACEMENTS.

DON'T BE TOO HASTY, SIR. WE JUST MIGHT DO SOMETHING.

SAMSON LOOKED AT THE BRAWNY FLIGHT SERGEANT AND GRINNED...

IF IT WAS POSSIBLE I KNOW YOU'D DO IT, CHIEFY. BUT YOU'LL MAKE NOTHING OUT OF THOSE BUT SCRAP.

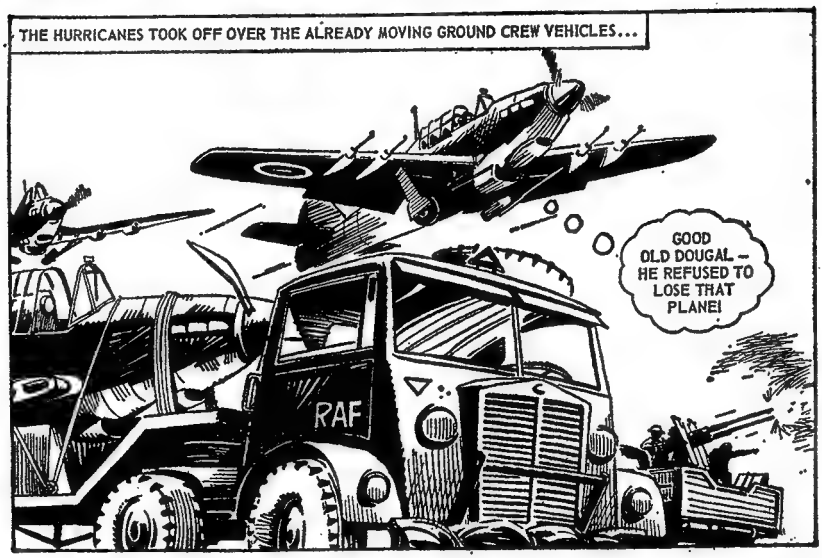
I MIGHT PROVE YOU WRONG THERE, SIR...

THE GROUND CREW REMOVED EVERY SERVICEABLE PART FROM THE TWO WRECKS AND CAREFULLY SORTED THEM OUT...
I WOULDN'T. HAVE BELIEVED IT. DOUGAL IS GOING TO MAKE ONE GOOD PLANE OUT OF THOSE TWO WRECKS.
IF HE'S GOT TIME. JERRY IS GETTING 'NEARER.
SOON THE ORDER CAME TO ABANDON THE AIRFIELD AND THE HURRICANES TOOK OFF TO BOMB THE APPROACHING GERMAN UNITS...
WE'LL LAND BACK TO RE-FUEL! HAVE EVERYTHING READY TO GO BY THEN, CHIEFY!
THE SMOKE OF THE HURRICANES' BOMB BURSTS WAS VISIBLE ON THE HORIZON AS THE GROUND CREWS RACED TO PACK EVERYTHING INTO THE VEHICLES...

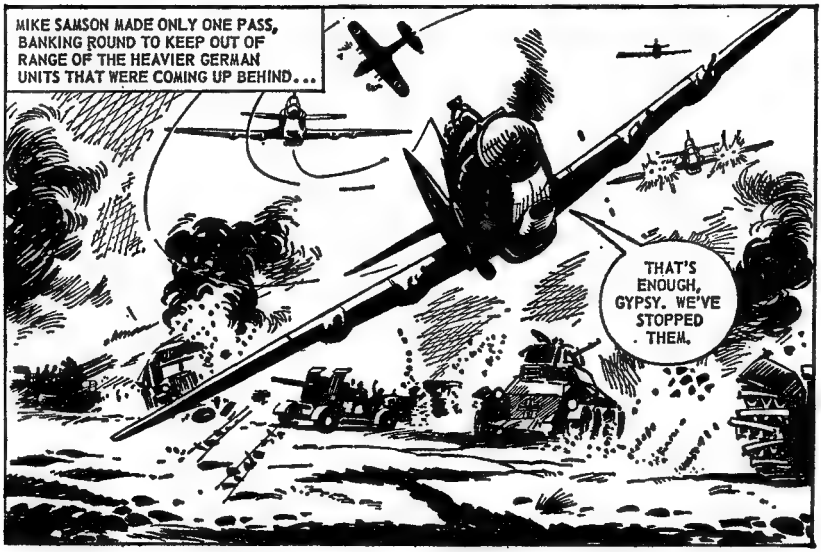
THE HURRICANES CAME BACK WITH THEIR BOMB RACKS EMPTY AND THEIR AMMUNITION SPENT...
HURRY UP WITH THAT BOWSER! CAN I HAVE THE PILOTS, SIR? I'M SHORT OF MEN.
RIGHT – BUT THERE'S VERY LITTLE TIME!

THE PILOTS JUMPED OUT OF THEIR COCKPITS AND RAN TO A LONG ARTICULATED LOW-LOADER...
OUR CRANE BROKE DOWN, SIR, AND I'M NOT GOING TO LEAVE THIS FOR JERRY AFTER ALL THE TROUBLE WE TOOK!
ALTOGETHER, HEAVE!

THE MASS OF MEN HEAVED THE FUSELAGE ABOARD THE WAGON AND PLACED THE WINGS ALONGSIDE. THEN THE AIRFIELD DEFENCES OPENED FIRE...


THE HURRICANES TOOK OFF OVER THE ALREADY MOVING GROUND CREW VEHICLES...
GOOD OLD DOUGAL – HE REFUSED TO LOSE THAT PLANE!
RAF

THE FORWARD UNITS OF THE GERMAN COLUMNS WERE RACING ACROSS THE SAND, BUT THEY STOPPED WHEN THEY SAW THE HURRICANES TURN TOWARDS THEM...
HALT! DEFENCE FORMATION!


MIKE SAMSON MADE ONLY ONE PASS, BANKING ROUND TO KEEP OUT OF RANGE OF THE HEAVIER GERMAN UNITS THAT WERE COMING UP BEHIND...
THAT'S ENOUGH, GYPSY. WE'VE STOPPED THEM.

IT WOULD BE SOME TIME BEFORE THE GERMAN UNITS WOULD DARE TO ABANDON THEIR DEFENSIVE POSITION AND BY THEN THE GROUND CREW WOULD BE CLEAR...

THEY WERE MOVING BACK TO AN AERODROME ALREADY OCCUPIED BY THE REST OF THE WING, SO SAMSON TOOK THE PLANES ON AHEAD...

THIS MAKES A CHANGE FROM THE LAST PLACE. DO YOU THINK I COULD SCROUNGE SOME EXTRA GRUB FOR MY GROUND CREW?

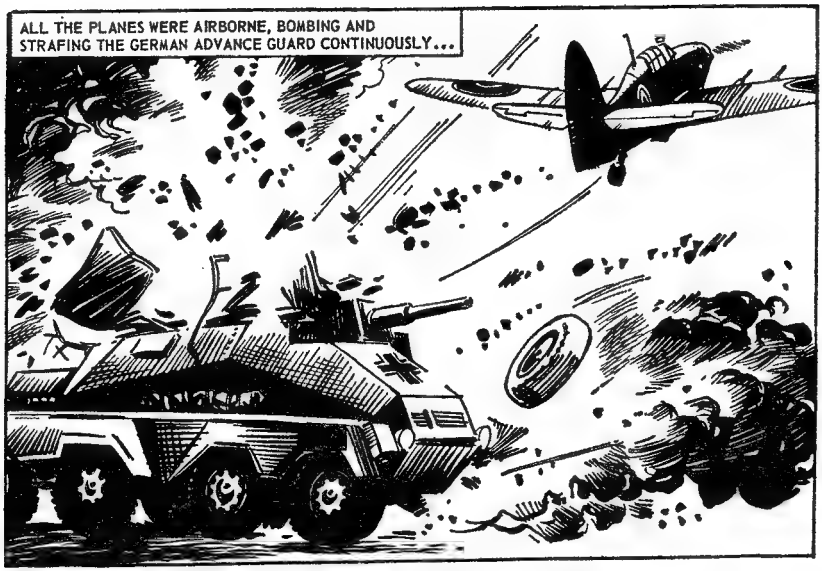
ISN'T THAT AGAINST REGULATIONS?

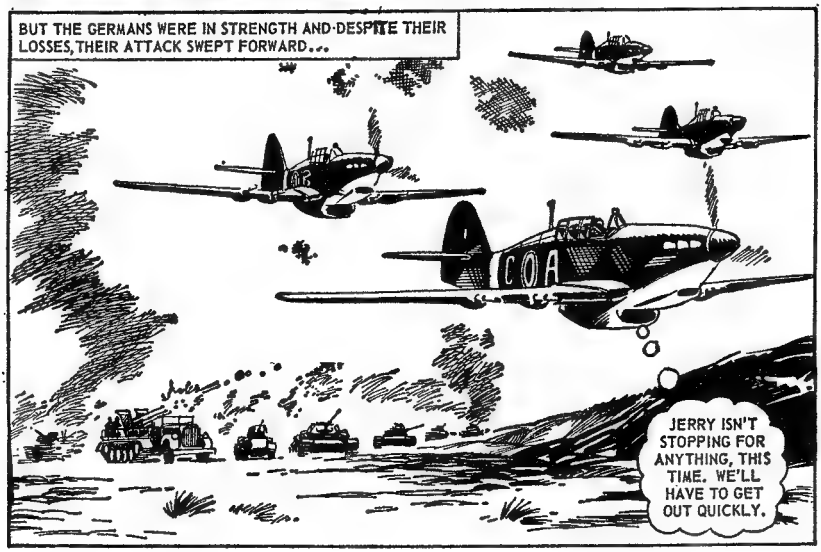
I'D BREAK A REGULATION OR TWO FOR MY GROUND CREW, VINES! ESPECIALLY WHEN THEY PROVIDE ME WITH AN EXTRA HURRICANE!

THEY DID NOT STAY LONG TO ENJOY THE AMENITIES OF THE PERMANENT AERODROME. THE GERMAN ADVANCE WAS CONTINUING AND THEY WERE FORCED TO RETREAT FROM ONE TEMPORARY BASE TO ANOTHER...
'GYPSIES' IS RIGHT. WE DON'T STAY TWO DAYS IN THE SAME PLACE.
I'D SOONER BE WITH THIS LOT THAN WITH SOME OF THOSE TOFFEE-NOSED CROWDS AT BASE.

SQUADRON LEADER MIKE SAMSON WAS THINKING MUCH THE SAME THOUGHTS AS HE STOOD LOOKING OUT OVER THE DARKENING DESERT...
IT'S NOT SUCH A BAD LIFE WHEN YOU COMMAND SUCH A GOOD BUNCH OF BLOKES...

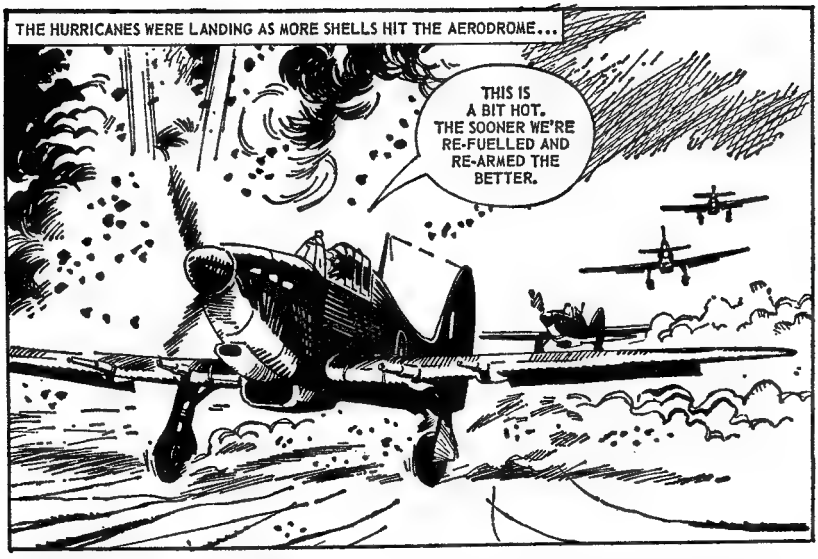
AND THEN DISASTER STRUCK. ROMMEL'S PANZERS BEGAN AN ALL-OUT ASSAULT, FORCING THE EIGHTH ARMY BACK TOWARDS EGYPT...
PACK UP! THE JERRIES ARE HEADING THIS WAY!
OH, NO! NOT AGAIN, CHIEF!


ALL THE PLANES WERE AIRBORNE, BOMBING AND STRAFING THE GERMAN ADVANCE GUARD CONTINUOUSLY...

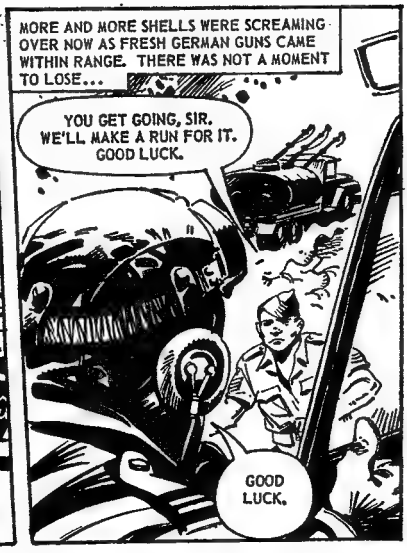

BUT THE GERMANS WERE IN STRENGTH AND DESPITE THEIR LOSSES, THEIR ATTACK SWEPT FORWARD...
COA
JERRY ISN'T STOPPING FOR ANYTHING, THIS TIME. WE'LL HAVE TO GET OUT QUICKLY.

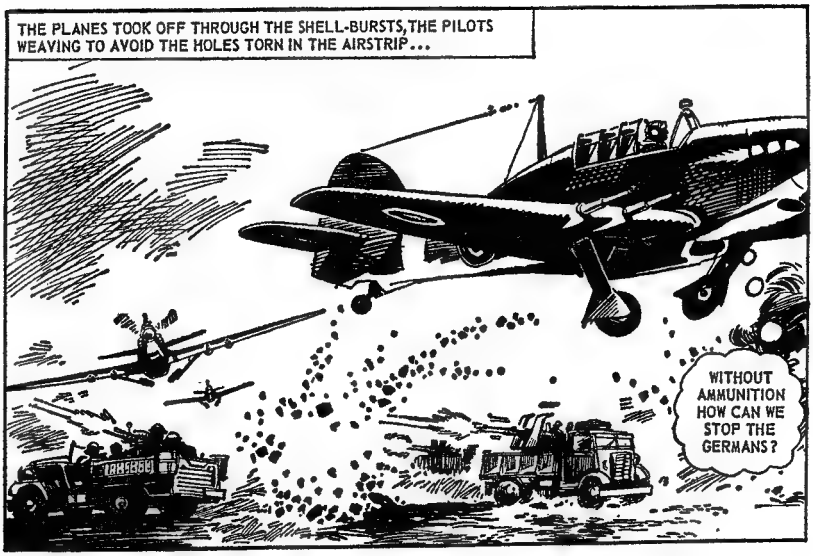
AS THE PLANES CAME INTO THE CIRCUIT THE PETROL BOWSERS STOOD READY AND THE ARMOURERS RAN TO GET FRESH DRUMS OF CANNON SHELLS FROM THE AMMUNITION TRUCK...
WHAT WAS THAT?
A SHELL! THE JERRIES HAVE GOT A GUN RANGED ON THE AIRFIELD!

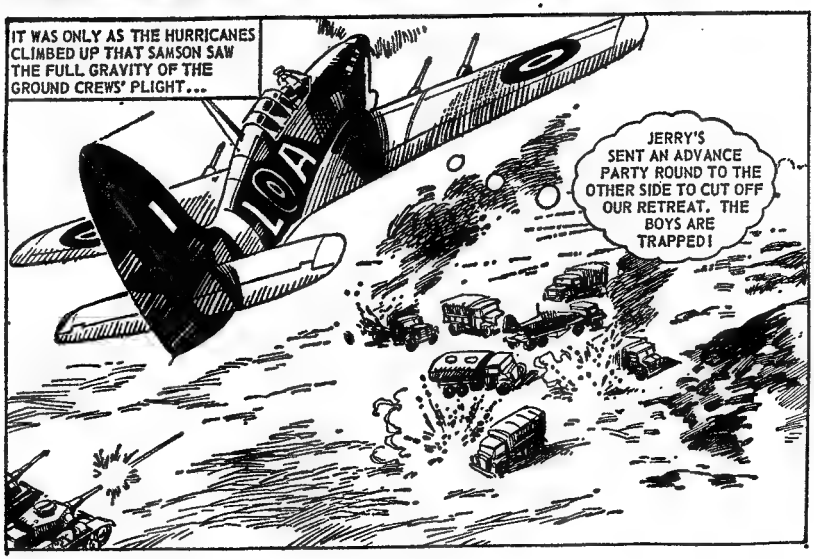
THE GERMANS' LUCK WAS IN. THE SECOND SHELL TO FALL ON THE AERODROME FOUND A TARGET...
THE AMMO TRUCK!


THE HURRICANES WERE LANDING AS MORE SHELLS HIT THE AERODROME...
THIS IS A BIT HOT. THE SOONER WE'RE RE-FUELLED AND RE-ARMED THE BETTER.

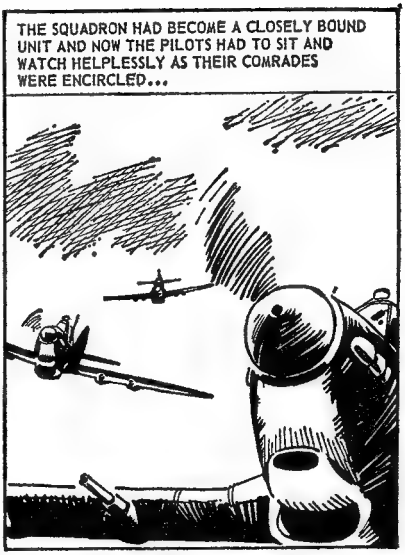
BUT THERE WERE NO SHELLS FOR THE PLANES' CANNON...
BUT WE FIRED ALL THE SHELLS WE WERE CARRYING ON THAT LAST SORTIE!
THERE'S NO AMMO AT ALL, SIR – THE TRUCK WAS HIT!


MORE AND MORE SHELLS WERE SCREAMING OVER NOW AS FRESH GERMAN GUNS CAME WITHIN RANGE. THERE WAS NOT A MOMENT TO LOSE...
YOU GET GOING, SIR. WE'LL MAKE A RUN FOR IT. GOOD LUCK.
GOOD LUCK.

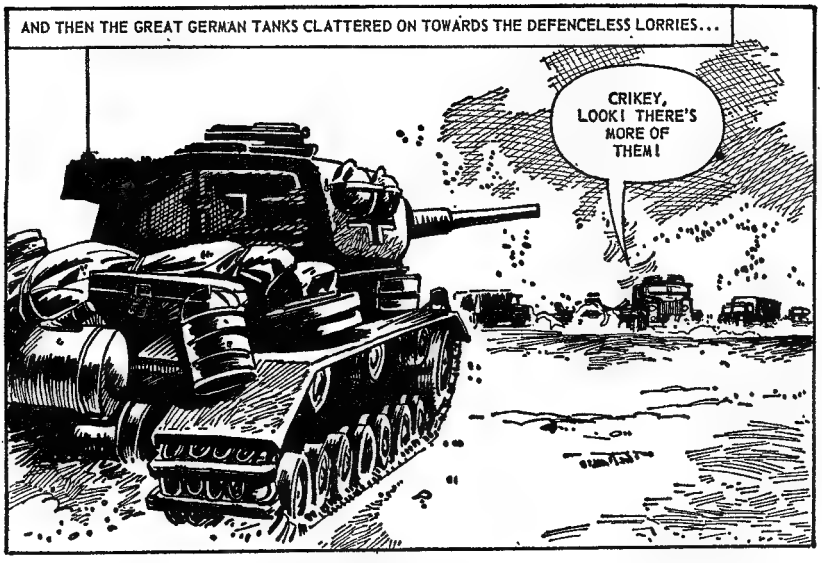

THE PLANES TOOK OFF THROUGH THE SHELL-BURSTS, THE PILOTS WEAVING TO AVOID THE HOLES TORN IN THE AIRSTRIP...
WITHOUT AMMUNITION HOW CAN WE STOP THE GERMANS?

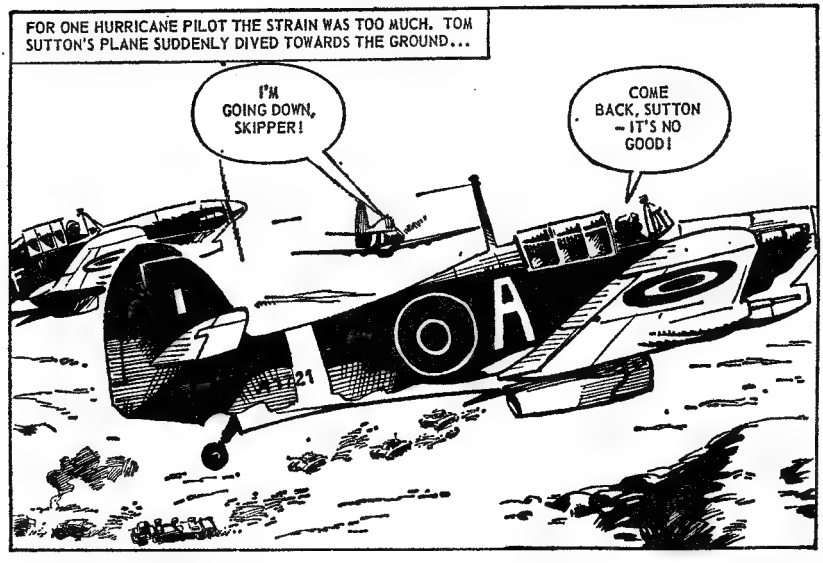

IT WAS ONLY AS THE HURRICANES CLIMBED UP THAT SAMSON SAW THE FULL GRAVITY OF THE GROUND CREWS' PLIGHT...
JERRY'S SENT AN ADVANCE PARTY ROUND TO THE OTHER SIDE TO CUT OFF OUR RETREAT. THE BOYS ARE TRAPPED!

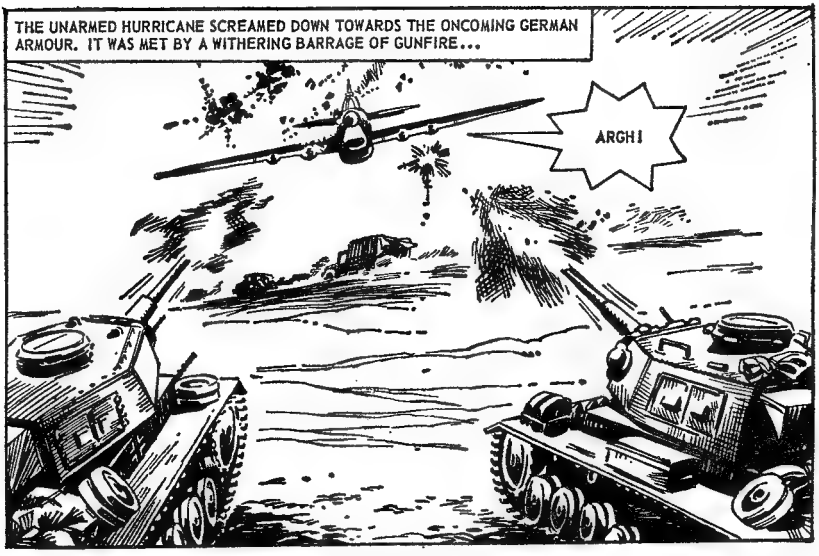
IF I TAKE THE PLANES DOWN I'LL LOSE SOME OF MY PILOTS – AND TO NO PURPOSE...
351
RAF.

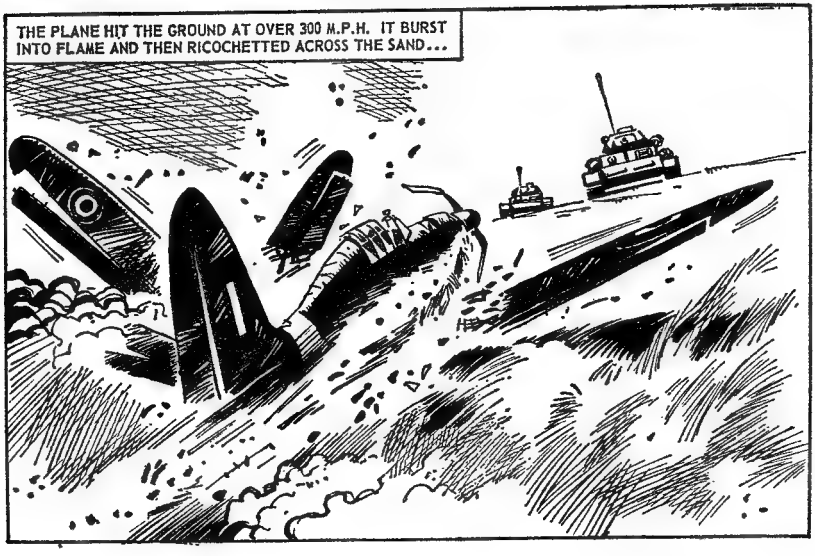

THE SQUADRON HAD BECOME A CLOSELY BOUND UNIT AND NOW THE PILOTS HAD TO SIT AND WATCH HELPLESSLY AS THEIR COMRADES WERE ENCIRCLED...

BELOW, THE MOBILE GUNS OF THE AERODROME DEFENCE UNITS WERE SOON OVERCOME BY THE FIRE POWER OF THE ENEMY'S ARMOUR...
UURGH!


AND THEN THE GREAT GERMAN TANKS CLATTERED ON TOWARDS THE DEFENCELESS LORRIES...
CRIKEY, LOOK! THERE'S MORE OF THEM!


FOR ONE HURRICANE PILOT THE STRAIN WAS TOO MUCH. TOM SUTTON'S PLANE SUDDENLY DIVED TOWARDS THE GROUND...
I'M GOING DOWN, SKIPPER!
COME BACK, SUTTON - IT'S NO GOOD!
A


THE UNARMED HURRICANE SCREAMED DOWN TOWARDS THE ONCOMING GERMAN ARMOUR. IT WAS MET BY A WITHERING BARRAGE OF GUNFIRE...
ARGH!


THE PLANE HIT THE GROUND AT OVER 300 M.P.H. IT BURST INTO FLAME AND THEN RICOCHETTED ACROSS THE SAND...

THE GERMAN TANKS ROLLED FORWARD AGAIN PAST THE SMOULDERING WRECKAGE...

THE R.A.F. VEHICLES GROUND TO A HALT, AS THEY WERE SURROUNDED BY THE MENACING GERMAN GUNS...

HANDE HOCH! FOR YOU THE WAR IS OVER.

WITH THAT GUN LOOKING AT US, I RECKON HE'S RIGHT.

OVERHEAD THE HURRICANES DISAPPEARED INTO THE DISTANCE AS THE GROUND CREW CLIMBED DOWN ON TO THE SAND...

COME ON, LADS, THERE'S NOTHING WE CAN DO.

THEY'RE NOT GOING TO HELP US! THEY'RE FLYING OFF!

FLIGHT SERGEANT DOUGAL GRABBED THE MAN...

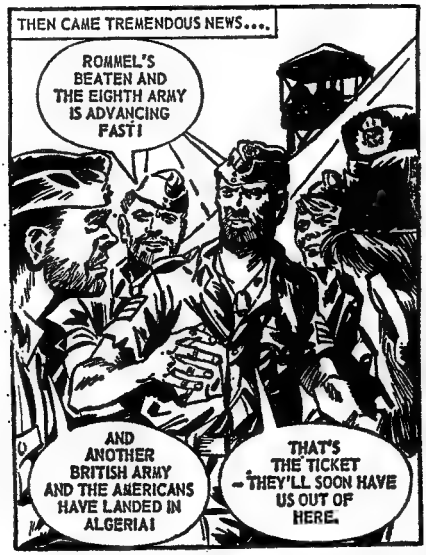
DIDN'T YOU SEE WHAT HAPPENED TO SUTTON? WASN'T THAT ENOUGH FOR YOU?

SORRY, CHIEFY.

THEY WERE STRIPPED OF WEAPONS AND MARCHED WESTWARDS...

SAVE YOUR WATER, YOU'LL NEED IT.

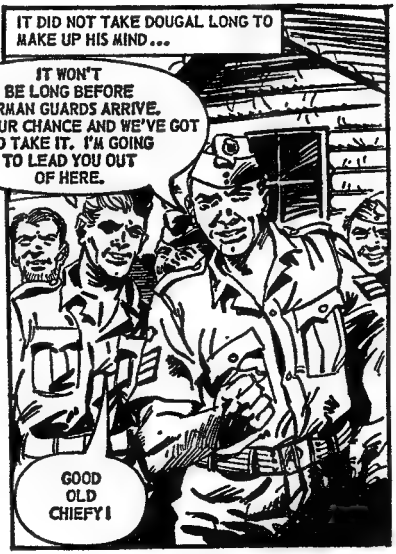
Chapter 3. *FIGHTING SPIRIT*


THEN CAME TREMENDOUS NEWS....
ROMMEL'S BEATEN AND THE EIGHTH ARMY IS ADVANCING FAST!
AND ANOTHER BRITISH ARMY AND THE AMERICANS HAVE LANDED IN ALGERIA!
THAT'S THE TICKET – THEY'LL SOON HAVE US OUT OF HERE.

BUT IT WAS NOT TO BE. BEFORE THE ADVANCING ALLIES COULD REACH THEM, THEY WERE PUT ON A SHIP FOR ITALY...

CONDITIONS IN THE CAMPS IN ITALY WERE BETTER THAN THEY HAD BEEN IN NORTH AFRICA AND THERE WAS A CONSTANT STREAM OF GOOD NEWS TO RAISE THEIR SPIRITS...
OUR CHAPS HAVE INVADED SICILY – IT CAN'T BE LONG BEFORE THEY'RE IN ITALY!
AND WE'LL BE GALLOPING AGAIN!

FOR WEEKS RUMOURS FILLED THE AIR. THEN ONE DAY, WITHOUT SAYING A WORD, THE GUARDS LEFT...
THERE YOU ARE – IT MUST BE TRUE! THE ALLIES HAVE LANDED AND ITALY HAS SURRENDERED!
BUT GERMANY HASN'T – SO WHAT HAPPENS TO US?


IT DID NOT TAKE DOUGAL LONG TO MAKE UP HIS MIND...
IT WON'T BE LONG BEFORE GERMAN GUARDS ARRIVE. NOW'S OUR CHANCE AND WE'VE GOT TO TAKE IT. I'M GOING TO LEAD YOU OUT OF HERE.
GOOD OLD CHIEFY!

THEY COLLECTED THEIR MEAGRE BELONGINGS AND MARCHED DOWN THE DESERTED ROAD THAT LED OUT OF THE CAMP...
WHERE ARE WE GOING, CHIEFY?
UP IN THE HILLS WHERE WE'LL BE SAFE.

KEEPING WELL AWAY FROM INHABITED AREAS THE EX-PRISONERS WENT HIGH INTO THE MOUNTAINS...

THE FOOD WE BROUGHT IS STARTING TO RUN OUT, CHIEFY.

THERE ARE SOME FARMS DOWN IN THE VALLEY – I'M GOING TO SEE THEM.

THE FARMERS WERE FRIENDLY AND AGREED TO GIVE THEM FOOD IN EXCHANGE FOR LABOUR. THEY ALSO GAVE DOUGAL NEWS OF THE WAR...

THEY SAY THE GERMANS HAVE MANY TROOPS TO THE SOUTH TO STOP THE ALLIES. OUR CHAPS ARE STILL ON TOP, BUT IT DOESN'T LOOK LIKE A QUICK VICTORY.

THE MEN WERE HAPPY IN THEIR NEW-FOUND FREEDOM, AND THEY WERE FAIRLY SAFE, MANY MILES BEHIND THE FRONT LINE. BUT CHIEFY DOUGAL WAS WORRIED.

WE'VE GOT PLENTY OF FOOD NOW – BUT WHAT ABOUT WINTER? AND SOME INFORMER IS GOING TO BETRAY US TO THE GERMANS SOONER OR LATER.

DOUGAL STARTED TO MAKE EXPEDITIONS OF EVER-INCREASING DISTANCES, AND FINALLY CAME ON SOMETHING OF INTEREST...
TWO OF JERRY'S REAR AERODROMES -- AND BIG ONES, TOO...

ON THE LONG JOURNEY BACK TO CAMP HE MADE HIS PLANS AND OUTLINED THEM TO HIS MEN WHEN HE GOT BACK...
I'M GOING TO TRY TO GET THROUGH TO THE ALLIED LINES. WHILE I'M GONE YOU KEEP WATCH ON THOSE AERODROMES, -- I WANT YOU TO FIND OUT EVERYTHING ABOUT THEM.
WE WON'T LET YOU DOWN, CHIEFY.

FOR THE FIRST TWO DAYS HE MARCHED STEADILY, KEEPING TO THE HIGH GROUND AWAY FROM ROADS – AND THE ENEMY...
MORE AND MORE JERRIES. I'D BETTER START MOVING BY NIGHT.

FOUR DAYS IT TOOK HIM. A LESSER MAN'S RESOLUTION MIGHT HAVE FALTERED, BUT DOUGAL NEVER LET UP...
I MUST BE IN THE FRONT LINE – THAT GUN IS DUG IN!

HE WAS ON THE OUTSKIRTS OF A SHELL-TORN VILLAGE FILLED WITH GERMAN TROOPS...

IT WAS RIFLE FIRE. NOT LONG AFTER, ALLIED TANKS AND INFANTRY MOVED IN PAST THE R.A.F. MAN'S HIDING PLACE...
22

HE WAITED TILL THINGS HAD CALMED DOWN AND THEN CAUTIOUSLY EMERGED...
I'M AN ESCAPED PRISONER OF WAR. AN R.A.F. FLIGHT SERGEANT.
IS THAT SO, BUD? WELL WE'LL SOON FIND OUT. COME ON...

THEY SENT HIM WITH AN ARMED ESCORT BACK TO THE NEAREST R.A.F. AIRFIELD...

WELL, BLOW ME DOWN! YOU COULDN'T HAVE BROUGHT ME TO A BETTER PLACE. THIS IS MY OLD SQUADRON – 'THE GALLOPING GYPSIES!'

THEY LEFT HIM IN THE GUARD-HOUSE AND DOUGAL PROMPTLY ASKED TO SEE THE COMMANDING OFFICER...

I BELIEVE YOU DEMANDED TO SEE ME.

SQUADRON LEADER VINES!

A GREAT DEAL HAD CHANGED ON THE SQUADRON. AFTER HIS IDENTITY HAD BEEN ESTABLISHED VINES TOOK HIM TO THE INTELLIGENCE ROOM...

I'VE BEEN IN COMMAND OF THIS SQUADRON EVER SINCE IT LEFT NORTH AFRICA. WE FLY MUSTANGS NOW – NOT OBSOLETE HURRICANES.

WE USED TO DO PRETTY WELL WITH THE OLD HURRICANES, SIR.

DOUGAL TOLD HIS STORY TO THE INTELLIGENCE OFFICER WHILE VINES LISTENED...
NEARLY ALL THE OLD GROUND CREW ARE THERE, AND IT WOULD BE POSSIBLE TO GET THEM OUT.
I DON'T THINK IT IS THE DUTY OF FLIGHT SERGEANTS TO ORIGINATE OPERATIONS, IS IT? THANK YOU FOR YOUR REPORT, IT WILL BE DEALT WITH IN THE NORMAL WAY.

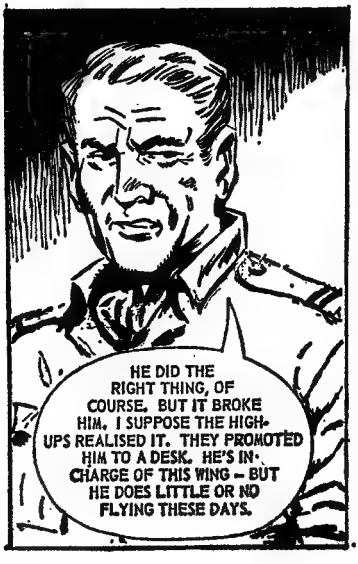
DOUGAL PROTESTED AS VINES SHOWED HIM THE DOOR...
BUT, SIR, I THOUGHT...
WHAT YOU THOUGHT IS OF NO CONSEQUENCE, FLIGHT SERGEANT. FIND YOURSELF A BILLET FOR THE NIGHT. YOU CAN GO BACK TO A RECEPTION UNIT IN THE MORNING.

DOUGAL WENT TO THE N.A.A.F.I. HE WAS GLUMLY SITTING THERE WHEN HE WAS SUDDENLY HAILED...
GYPSIES
I KNOW THOSE MEN COULD BE RESCUED...
MY STARS – IT'S CHIEFY DOUGAL! WHERE DID YOU SPRING FROM?

FLYING OFFICER BAKER HAD BEEN WITH THE SQUADRON IN THE OLD DAYS, AND HE TOLD DOUGAL THAT MOST OF THE PILOTS HAD STAYED WITH THE 'GYPSIES'...

SQUADRON LEADER SAMSON, SIR – WHAT HAPPENED TO HIM?

HE WAS NEVER THE SAME MAN AFTER HE LED THE PLANES AWAY FROM YOUR CHAPS. IT TOOK ALL THE FIGHT AND SPIRIT OUT OF HIM.



ANY DOUBTS BAKER MAY HAVE HAD ABOUT HIS ACTION WERE BANISHED WHEN HE WALKED INTO THE WING COMMANDER'S OFFICE...

THERE'S SOMEBODY HERE I THOUGHT YOU'D LIKE TO MEET, SIR.

DOUGAL! CHIEFY DOUGAL, BY ALL THAT'S WONDERFUL!

SAMSON LISTENED TO DOUGAL'S STORY. THEN HE STOOD UP IN THE OLD FORCEFUL WAY, HIS EYES BLAZING WITH THEIR OLD FIGHTING SPIRIT...

OF COURSE WE MUST GET THEM OUT! LEAVE THIS TO ME!

THERE WAS MEETING AFTER MEETING AT GROUP HEADQUARTERS. DOUGAL WAS SENT FOR, BUT AT THE END IT WAS A STRAIGHT FIGHT BETWEEN SAMSON AND VINES...

WE OWE IT TO THESE MEN TO GET THEM OUT!

WING COMMANDER SAMSON'S CONCERN IS UNDERSTANDABLE, BUT IT'S TOO RISKY. WE COULD LOSE A LOT OF PLANES FOR NOTHING.

IN THE END IT WAS THE MEMORY OF THE OLD 'GALLOPING GYPSIES' THAT TILTED THE BALANCE...

THE SQUADRON HAS NEVER BEEN AS GOOD AS IT WAS IN THOSE DAYS. AND SAMSON HAS GOT ALL HIS OLD FIGHTING SPIRIT BACK ALREADY.

I THINK IT'S WORTH THE RISK. WING COMMANDER SAMSON WILL TAKE OVER COMMAND OF THE SQUADRON AND HE WILL BE IN COMPLETE CHARGE OF THE OPERATION.

A RECONNAISSANCE MOSQUITO FLEW NORTH NEXT DAY, WITH FLIGHT SERGEANT DOUGAL AS PASSENGER...

LO

753 W

THAT'S THEM!

RIGHT. TOSS OUT THE MESSAGE.

THE GROUND CREW EAGERLY OPENED THE TOSSED OUT MESSAGE TIN.
DOUGAL MADE IT! WE'VE GOT TO PREPARE A DROPPING ZONE.

AS THE MOON WENT DOWN A COUPLE OF NIGHTS LATER, A LANCASTER BOMBER FOLLOWED THE MOSQUITO'S ROUTE...
THAT'S IT – THERE'S THE SIGNAL..
RIGHT, YOU GET DOWN TO YOUR HATCH, FLIGHT SERGEANT. AND GOOD LUCK!

THE BOMB BAYS OF THE LANCASTER WERE PACKED WITH SUPPLY CONTAINERS AND AS THE PLANE CAME LOW ACROSS THE ZONE, PARACHUTES FLOATED DOWN...

THERE'S CHIEFY! AND TWO OTHER MEN!

STAND CLEAR TILL EVERYTHING'S DOWN!

BACK IN ONE OF THE LOG HUTS DOUGAL INTRODUCED HIS TWO COMPANIONS...

THESE TWO GENTLEMEN ARE SOUTH AFRICAN PILOTS WHO HAVE BOTH FLOWN JUNKERS FIFTY-TWOS. THAT'S WHAT WE'RE GOING HOME IN!

THE MEN WHO HAD BEEN SPYING ON THE GERMAN AERODROMES KNEW NOW WHY DOUGAL HAD WANTED THE GERMANS WATCHED.

THE FOOD STORE IS HERE – AND THE TRANSPORT AND PETROL HERE.

WELL DONE, BLOKES.

WHEN ALL WAS READY, A MESSAGE WAS SENT ON THE WIRELESS THAT DOUGAL HAD BROUGHT WITH HIM...

THIS IS IT. TOMORROW AT DAWN, GENTLEMEN.

THAT NIGHT THE GROUND CREW MOVED DOWN FROM THE MOUNTAINS. THEY CARRIED THE GUNS THAT HAD BEEN DROPPED TO THEM, AND PLENTY OF TOOLS...

SOON BE THROUGH...

THE FIRST PARTY CUT THEIR WAY INTO THE GERMAN FIGHTER BASE...
THIS IS THE FOOD STORE, CHIEFY.
RIGHT – GET THE SUGAR, MAKE IT QUICK!

THEY POLLUTED EVERY PETROL TANK AND STORAGE CHAMBER THEY COULD FIND ON BOTH AERODROMES...
THIS IS GOING TO MAKE A MESS OF THEIR ENGINES!

OTHERS DRAINED THE OIL FROM THE GEARBOXES OF AS MANY VEHICLES AS THEY COULD FIND...
I'VE JUST GOT TO PUT THE PLUG BACK AND GET RID OF THE OIL – WE DON'T WANT THEM TO KNOW WHAT WE'VE DONE.
COME ON, FRED, THE GUARD WILL BE ALONG IN A MINUTE.

AND FINALLY MEN MOVED ALONG THE LINES OF AIRCRAFT, CLAMPING DELAYED-ACTION FIRE-BOMBS IN VITAL PLACES...
WE WERE TRAINED TO LOOK AFTER ENGINES – AND TONIGHT WE'RE RUINING THEM...
ALL IN A GOOD CAUSE, CHIEFY.

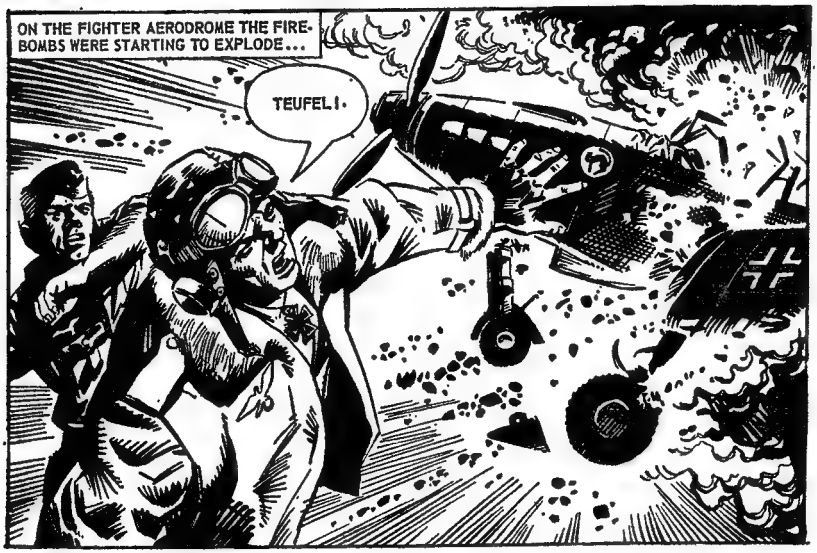
THEN THEY MOVED BACK TO THEIR RENDEZVOUS NEAR THE BOUNDARY OF THE TRANSPORT AERODROME...
WE'VE CHECKED THE JUNKERS, CHIEFY. THE NEAREST ONE AND THE ONE FIFTY YARDS ALONG HAVE GOT A FULL LOAD OF PETROL.
RIGHT. BUT WE'LL MAKE SURE WE CAN START THEM BEFORE WE SABOTAGE THE OTHERS.

AS DAWN BROKE THEY MADE FOR THE TWO JUNKERS. IT WAS THEN THAT THEY WERE SPOTTED...
ACHTUNG! SABOTEURS!

AS THE GROUND CREW RACED TO PUSH STARTER TROLLEYS INTO POSITION, SO THE GERMAN GUARDS SPRANG INTO ACTION...
SCHNELL! SCHNELL!

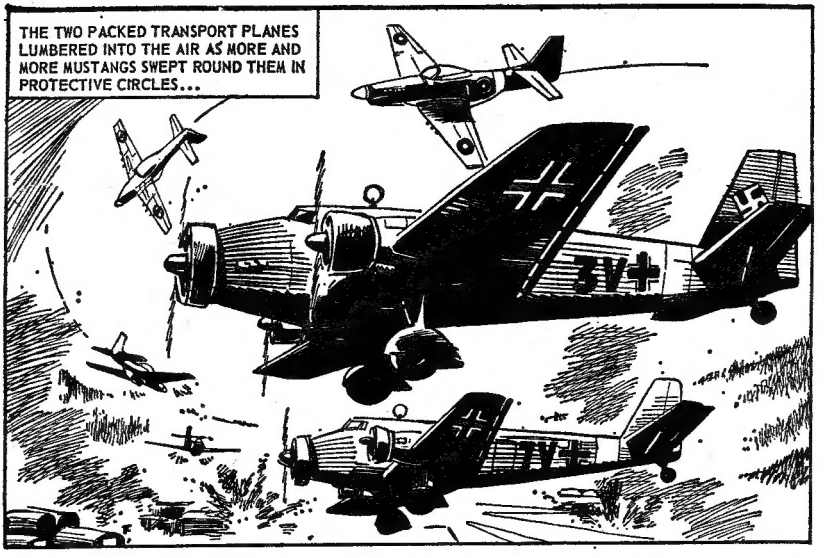
BUT THE VEHICLES THE GERMANS CLAMBERED INTO HAD BEEN SABOTAGED BY EXPERTS...
HIMMEL! IT'S SEIZED SOLID.
DUMMKOPF! RUN!

THE ENGINES OF THE JUNKERS TRANSPORTS BURST INTO LIFE AS THE LAST OF THE GROUND CREW CLIMBED ON BOARD, UNDER COVER OF DOUGAL'S BLAZING STEN...
GET GOING, LADS!
WE'VE PUT BOMBS ON THE OTHERS, CHIEFY!


ON THE FIGHTER AERODROME THE FIRE-BOMBS WERE STARTING TO EXPLODE...
TEUFEL!

BUT THE GROUND CREW HAD NOT BEEN ABLE TO KNOCK OUT ALL THE VEHICLES. AND BY NOW THE GERMAN AERODROME DEFENCE GUNNERS WERE WAKING UP TO THE SITUATION...
SCHNELL FEUER!

AND THEN A FLIGHT OF MUSTANGS SWEPT IN FROM THE SOUTH, STREAKING LOW OVER THE AIRFIELDS WITH GUNS BLAZING...
GET THE GUNS, GYPSY!
THEY'RE OUR BLOKES – DEAD ON TIME!


THE TWO PACKED TRANSPORT PLANES LUMBERED INTO THE AIR AS MORE AND MORE MUSTANGS SWEPT ROUND THEM IN PROTECTIVE CIRCLES...
3V+
7V+

WHEN THEY FINALLY TURNED FOR HOME, THE AIRCRAFT LEFT THE GERMAN AIRFIELDS IN BLAZING RUIN...
TRUST DOUGAL'S BOYS TO DO A GOOD JOB. THEY'RE WORTH SAVING ALL RIGHT...

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